

## Post-colonial Literature: The Art of resistance

أدب ما بعد الاستعمار: فن المقاومة

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### Abstract:

In the last century, British nations previously occupied by the Empire have produced a fantastic literary production, which has altered the geography of English literature. One of the fascinating developments in modern English literature has been the rise of post-colonial literature, which refers to works published in English in nations formerly colonized by the United Kingdom or other Western powers. What sets post-colonial writing apart from different kinds of literature is that; it enables us to look at the world in ways we have not before, reassess long-held ideas, and redefine functional divisions between insiders and outsiders. The present paper intends to focus on how writers use national identity and traditional ideas to explain cultural values and representations in newly independent countries.

**Keywords:** Post-colonialism, literature, identity, woman, language.

### ملخص:

في القرن الماضي، أنتجت الدول البريطانية التي كانت تحتلها الإمبراطورية في السابق إنتاجاً أدبياً مذهلاً، غيّر جغرافية الأدب الإنجليزي. من أكثر التطورات الرائعة في الأدب الإنجليزي الحديث ظهور أدب ما بعد الاستعمار، والذي يشير إلى الأعمال التي نُشرت باللغة الإنجليزية في الدول التي كانت مستعمرة سابقاً من قبل المملكة المتحدة أو القوى الغربية الأخرى. ما يميز الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار عن الأنواع الأخرى هو أنه نهيئنا من النظر إلى العالم بطرق لم نقم بها من قبل، وإعادة تقييم الأفكار القديمة، وإعادة تعريف التقسيمات الوظيفية بين المطلعين والأجانب. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى التركيز على الطرق التي يقوم بها المؤلفون بتشكيل الهويات المجتمعية واستجواب قيم وتمثيلات الشعوب في الدول المستقلة حديثاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار، الأدب، الهوية، المرأة، اللغة.

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## **1. Introduction**

Post-colonialism has had a continuous presence in academic literature since the early 1980s. While post-colonial literature continues to debate the accurate perception of dynamics between Western and non-Western people and their worlds, the emphasis has shifted to highlighting the fact that when Westerners observe non-Westerners, they are only seeing reflections of themselves and their preconceptions.

Due to the variety and wide range of the field, it is worth considering if one can ever really talk of post-colonialism, with all the coherency that this term implies. Rather than using an umbrella term that lets in so much, it might be better to begin but questioning post-colonialism as a meaningful concept and seeking better ways of accounting for its prevailing, manifold subject matters.

Post-colonialism is a term that refers to very diverse and difficult to define critical activity. The word is often spelled with a hyphen (post-colonial/post-colonialism) and sometimes without (postcolonial/postcolonialism). Both versions are used interchangeably by various commentators to refer to the same areas of concern. Political scientists and economists initially used the hyphenated variant to refer to the post-colonial period. Still, from about the late seventies, it was turned into a more wide-ranging culturalist analysis in the hands of literary critics and others. (Ashcroft et al., 1998)

Post-colonialism may be defined as the examination of colonialism and its influence, both on an individual level, in former colonial countries, and on a larger global scale. In this regard, Peter Brooker (1999) explains:

The study of the ideological and cultural impact of Western colonialism and, in particular of its aftermath –whether as a continuing influence (neocolonialism) or in the emergence of newly articulated independent national and individual identities (p. 193).

Additionally, post-colonialism may be viewed as a critical examination of the history, culture, literature, and forms of discourse unique to England, Spain, France, and other European colonial powers' former colonies. The concentration is on Africa, Asia,

the Caribbean, South America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; on English literature written in those locations.

It is also frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept, referring to the time after colonization has ended or the period following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country chooses to be governed by another state or type of governance than the one that was previously in place. However, one does share John McLeod's definition that "post-colonialism is not contained by the tidy categories of historical periods or dates, although it remains firmly bound up with historical experiences" (McLeod, 2000, p. 5).

The main research question of this study is to determine what constitutes post-colonial literature, and what are the main themes that it explores? How did the post-colonial writer succeed in establishing it as a distinct literary genre?

After defining post-colonialism and its theories, the purpose of this research is to examine the key issues dealt with in post-colonial works, and lastly, to discuss the role of the English language and women writers in this post-colonial literature, among other things.

## **2. Post-colonial Theories: Decolonizing the Mind**

Colonialism is a factual reality that has impacted nearly every country on the planet at one time or another. For the vast majority of the world's people, colonialism has been or continues to be an experience of colonization. The concept that some people have the right to govern over others has penetrated history. The histories of an unknown number of people have been destroyed, exterminated, or absorbed into oblivion throughout colonization's history.

To gain their freedom from colonialism, people had to both declare independence and raise their flags. Additionally, there must be a shift in attitudes, a challenge to the traditional ways of perceiving, in Ngugi's phrase '*decolonizing the mind*' (1998).

Important research from the 1950s studied the effects on colonized populations who acquired colonial ideas. French colonization devastated many peoples' lives, as

shown by a famous psychologist, Frantz Fanon. Colonialism's end was not simply political and economic, but it was also a mental shift for Fanon. Until then, colonization will continue.(Anindita, M.2014).

But Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is one of the most important books of the late 20th century. He also looked at the split relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Still, from a different aspect, he and Fanon, like him, examined the extent to which colonialism had produced a way to look at the world and order of things to learn as natural and right. Edward Said was the promoter of post-colonialism, for the success of *Orientalism* in 1978 was a significant reduction in encouraging new forms of research, including feminism, philosophy, psychology, politics, anthropology, and literary theory (Prasad, 2003).

Two more critical colonial discourse theorists followed in Said's footsteps, which influenced the field of thought, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, both born in the former British colony in India, were the primary challengers and developers of Said in *Orientalism's* ideas. The trio's excellent standing in this field led them to be marked 'Holy Trinity' by post-colonialist theorists in the book *Colonial Desire*, written by critic Robert J C. Young (1995). Bhabha has been specifically focused on finding ways of resisting the colonial discourses of colonial subjects and his term of imitation has become crucial to understanding the connection between colonizers and colonized. In uncovering resistance, subversion, and disobedience strategies utilized by the colonized as the means of dealing with or, rather, subverting the colonial situation, mimicry is particularly essential.

In her influential essays '*Subaltern Studies*'(1988) and '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*' (1993), Spivak investigated the dilemma of whether or not it is possible to retrieve the voices of individuals who, especially women, have had colonial representations, and to read them as potentially disruptive and subversive.

Said, Bhabha, and Spivak have raised a wide variety of theoretical concerns fundamental to post-colonialism since the 1980s. Certainly, their works contributed significantly to the field's development since the 1980s, and their publications are unavoidably indispensable in any work on post-colonialism.

### 3. Post-colonial Literature: an overview

When we talk about literature, we are talking about ideas in history. It is a reflection of thoughts, feelings, and culture of a particular time and place. A nation's history is always given form and expression through the arts, which serves as a vehicle for the despair and optimism of its people. An intriguing element of contemporary English literature is the growth of post-colonial literature, which are those published in English in countries that were previously colonized by the United Kingdom or other European powers.

There were heated discussions concerning the name for literatures that were meant to deal with post-colonialism from the very beginning. In the 1960s, the term 'Commonwealth literature' (Innes, 2007, p.5). However, according to most critics, this term is insufficient and unclear, albeit not strictly negative since literatures that were supposed to be labeled 'Commonwealth literature' were only different national literary works with only one thing in common and that is the fact that their authors were born or lived in one of the Commonwealth countries.

Indeed, the term 'post-colonial literature' became to be preferred "because it points the way towards possible study of the effects of colonialism in and between writing in English and writing in indigenous languages ...as well as writing in other language diasporas" (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 23). Nevertheless, critics argue that there can appear even a more appropriate term. Whatever the name, the aim is to shed light on the literature and culture that was previously oversimplified and trivialized and put into ghettos by the colonizers.

Post-colonial literature evokes a diverse range of emotions. It frequently incorporates the consideration of diverse experiences such as slavery, migration, suppression, resistance, diversity, race, gender, and place and reactions to imperial Europe's discourses such as history, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics. Thus, it is frequently literature of 'otherness', and rejection is produced from the perspective of a particular local experience. It evolved from a colonial experience, started by

highlighting the tension with the imperial power and emphasized by its divergence from the imperial center's assumptions. (Ashcroft, B and Al, 1998)

What truly defines post-colonial literature as a victory is its ability to bring continents, civilizations, and traditions together, interact, and progress toward a new creative life. It has evolved as a very strong and hopeful reaction to the human condition in a world of change, pulls, and pressures in the hands of white and non-white writers. The authors and poets have depicted an unavoidable reality.

### **3.1. Post-colonial Novel: Themes and Developments**

In the last half-century, the attention of increasing numbers of readers and researchers worldwide has grown from post-colonial literature and post-colonial studies. Major literary awards such as the Booker Prize or the Nobel Prize have often been given out, and their winners include celebrated writers such as J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer from South Africa, Seamus Heaney from Ireland, Margaret Atwood from Canada, Peter Carey and Patrick White from Australia, and Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria. Simultaneously, their publications have provided a variety of post-colonial perspectives on the nature and significance of these and other literary, philosophical, and historical works, as well as strategies for reading and interpreting them (Innes, 2007).

Post-colonial literature began in Africa and quickly expanded to all continents. Chinua Achebe and Nadine Gordimer established post-colonial writing as a genre. Since then, it has grown rapidly in popularity, and many writers worldwide have begun publishing novels, dramas, and collections of poetry. *Things Fall Apart*, a novel by Chinua Achebe, is a one-of-a-kind piece of literary art in the world of fiction. Published in 1958, during Nigeria's renaissance, this is Achebe's first and perhaps best-known novel. It is also his most widely read. The book examines Nigeria's early colonial history, from the country's initial encounter with the British through extensive British control.

Although many older books and plays tried to suggest a unified national identity, more recent ones aim to reflect and affirm the nation's diversity and inclusiveness. For

instance, migration experiences; in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1973), and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) affect the protagonists' personality development. Both characters in the stories suffer through mental detachment because of their migrations. Both of them migrated to avoid being controlled by the men in their lives. Under their position, moving was not a decision they had any control over. They would not fare well because they don't feel comfortable in a new country viewed as an exile.

With a growing number of published works, indigenous people from late colonized and marginalized nations find their voices. These individuals are making an effort to define their own goals, enact their ideas, and recover their history and identity. These writers discuss and promote a notion of national identity and soon gain recognition as classic works in Commonwealth and post-colonial literature and the international educational curriculum.

### **3.2. Post-colonial Writer's Attitude towards the English Language**

Basically, the task of the post-colonial studies and theories is the way to emphasize diversity within equality. It means that the theory should follow the ideas of impurity (in the positive sense of the word) of post-colonial cultures and abandon the idea of the myths of pure and superior culture. Several other concepts are connected; first of all, and most important as far as writing or literature is concerned, it is the concept of language – English in particular.

However, some authors are more radical and claim that English as the language of the oppressors should be completely abandoned and the literature should be written in the local languages and they usually deal with topics different from those writing in English, though it is not a rule (Margulis, J. & Nowakoski, P, 1996). Still, more post-colonial authors use English as the language of expression because they make their works available to as wide audience as possible since they aim is to give voice to the literatures (and themes and topics) that were previously avoided. And English is a language that is understood internationally. The other reason is that language generally is a very flexible and '*versatile tool*' (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 39). English is continually

changing and growing and thus becoming a part of a group of Englishes, a language that is then capable of expressing cultural complexity; it is suitable for many uses. In literature 'English language becomes a tool with which a 'world' can be textually constructed' (Ibid, p. 43).

Following in the footsteps of post-colonial authors, contemporary writers have had to examine several approaches to employ language derived from the colonizers while avoiding both transmitting the traditions and ideology of the West. When persons were educated in the language of the colonizer, they found themselves in a double-edged situation, in which they could speak the language well enough to 'write back to the empire,' while at the same time attempting to portray their nationalistic and ethnic identities by using the language of the colonizer. However, being fluent in the colonizer's language gives authors the ability to retell stories, revise the past, and disempower myth.

#### **4. Post-colonial women writing**

Broadly speaking, post-colonialism is born out of colonized peoples' frustrations, oppression, and struggle. It does so to overcome the past and achieve psychological healing through the suggestion of an alternative culture, epistemology, or system of knowing.

In many civilizations, women have been excluded, marginalized, and 'colonized' from the perspective of 'Other.' Women have had to build their own language, like post-colonial, when their only tools accessible are those of the colonizer. Both groups are weak, exploited, and socially subordinated (de la Mata).

Women's writing has been colonized from both the outside and the within in a post-colonial context. Kirsten Hoist Petersen and Anna Rutherford correctly assert in their 1986 book *A Double Colonization* that there is a parallel in the relationships between man and woman, empire and colony, or colonizer and colonized. This has frequently been referred to in post-colonial thought as women's 'dual colonization' in colonial circumstances. In the 1980s, this notion became a cliché in feminist and post-colonial discourse. It is the belief that women are colonized twice, once by European



imperial colonizers and then by patriarchal ideas within their nation. Women are already subject to this type of ‘dual colonization’ in a colonized setting.

Spivak examines the topic from a different perspective, focusing on the concept of ‘double colonization’, which refers to the impact on women of both patriarchy and colonialism, as well as the impact of colonialism alone. The silence of women and their lives is detailed in several of Spivak’s publications, including her most renowned essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1993), which describes attempts to reclaim their lost voices from the pages of history.

Along with other colonized citizens, women undergo oppressions executed by the colonizers and are targeted by the local patriarchal power structures fighting against the colonizers but executing their powers on women within the given situation. Women suffer under both colonial and local power structures, simultaneously; they undergo ‘multiple colonization’. Women’s writing may be seen as resisting such a ‘multiple colonization’ within a larger literary context that is highly patriarchal.

## 5. Conclusion

Post-colonial writing involves the struggle over projections and issues of representation. It can be seen as a part of the wider context of a resistance movement against the imperial power and its systematic practice of silencing native voices, as they engage themes of resistance and the search for an independent community.

Due to their focus on location and displacement, post-colonial novels show characters struggling with identity crises as a result of migration, enslavement, and mythology. They resist homogenization and highlight cultural peculiarities in post-colonial situations.

Among the themes explored in the post-colonial novel are those of displacement, identity, home, and stereotype, among others. The employment of comprehensive descriptions of indigenous people, locations, and customs by post-colonial writers is intended to oppose or ‘resist’ the stereotypes, errors, and generalizations that colonizers

propagated in educational texts as well as legal, political, and social situations. In this respect, Salman Rushdie evokes the potential of the post-colonial novel when he writes,

Those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, [...] are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day (Rushdie, 1991, pp. 12-13).

In this case, Rushdie alludes to the self-awareness in the post-colonial novel as well as the sometimes unstable and shaky construction of meaning involved in all descriptions of the past and indeed in the construction of identity in the present.

When looking at a literary work the first thing we notice is the language and style. In a post-colonial novel, these are very important elements. English has been considered the language of oppressors. Therefore, some writers from the first generation of post-colonial writers refused to write in it and gave preference to their native language.

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